

MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 16, 1967
2:45 p.m., Saturday

FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Lunch with the AFL-CIO Executive Council on
September 15, 1967

The President's Introductory Remarks

The President welcomed the labor leaders and said that the support of the labor movement has sparked the success of the Administration's programs to bring a better life to every American. Men are at work today at the highest wages in history. Five million have joined the payrolls in the past three years. Our goal is to assure that every man has a decent job at a decent wage. There is much work ahead to fulfill this aim.

The President looked to the three great domestic problems: Crime, Housing, and Training for new skills and opportunities. He mentioned the insurance companies' pledge of \$1 billion to aid the construction of homes for poor families as an example of the needed involvement of the private sector.

The President hoped that "the labor movement will want to outdo the insurance companies and that the Pension and Welfare funds could be used to help support these vital programs for people." These will make good Pension Fund investments because the Government will try to transfer the land at little or no cost to local housing authorities, the housing authorities in turn would issue tax-exempt bonds, guaranteed by the Government, and homes under the Rent Supplement Program could be built for poor people.

He said that, "As long as I am President the door will always be open to you -- the labor leaders of America."

George Meany

To negotiate with the Viet Cong is like negotiating a collective bargaining agreement with an invisible employer. Every responsible citizen must be against withdrawal in Vietnam. That is not the answer. We are in Vietnam to honor a commitment which preceded President Johnson and which was later authorized by the Congress. He is following exactly the right course.

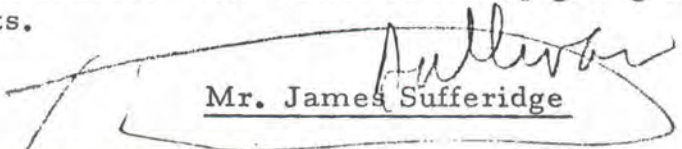
The President finds himself pressured in the Congress, and at times beleaguered by members of his own party, but no one can rightfully challenge the great record of the past four years.

Mr. Meany cited education and said that for the first time in history the Federal Government has assumed the responsibility for the education of the children. We are moving toward the great goal of providing all the education a child can assimilate, irrespective of his station in life.

The score is excellent -- Medicare, Social Security, and Minimum Wage are all landmarks to progress.

There are, of course, some measures the labor movement does not agree with. This is natural. The tax bill is one. The labor movement believes there should be a surtax -- but the loopholes which benefit the wealthy (capital gains, depletion, "sheltered real estate") should be plugged. The wealthy escape paying taxes they owe to society.

Mr. Meany said that he did, after all, have "one gripe". This involved the J. P. Stevens Company, a firm which prides itself in the violation of the laws and injury to the working man. In this day, J. P. Stevens stands as a symbol of the robber barons. Something must be done about a firm that continuously flouts the National Labor Relations Board and court orders. The answer is to stop giving that firm Government contracts.



Mr. James Sufferidge

Mr. Sufferidge had been one of the election observers in Vietnam. He said that the press is doing a poor job of reporting, always playing up the dark and pessimistic side. The truth is that we are winning militarily, but this story is not being told. The failure of the press accounts for some of the disillusionment among the people.

The President

State and Local Lands for Housing Projects

The President asked the labor leaders to contact their city and state elected officials, the Mayors and the Governors, to see what city and state land might be made available for low-income housing projects. The Federal Government has set a good example, and this should be followed by the local governments. Our purpose, said the President is to make the "idle lands bloom with houses in our cities".

The Polls

While our polls are low, they were lower last year. When you pass programs for the people that strike at vested interests, you tend to lose some points in the ratings. The President cited the Civil Rights and Medicare programs as two examples.

Although the polls are low, our opponents' are much lower. The President cited his lead over Romney, -Nixon and Reagan during the last two months.

Vietnam

The President used a series of small charts to show the improvement in the Vietnam situation. The first chart showed that the Allied Forces had gained much greater population control and that the Viet Cong grip on the country was shrinking. In answer to charges of "stalemate", the President pointed to the rapid rise in Viet Cong defection rates, the leveling-off (rather than the increase) of enemy forces, and the sharp dip in the desertion rate in the South Vietnamese army. This rate will come down even lower, as certain South Vietnamese generals are replaced.

The President said every day, each day, we are offering to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh. Our position is clear. We will stop the bombing if he will launch productive and meaningful discussions. We are not asking, as most people think, that stopping the infiltration is a condition of a bombing pause.

Vietnam (con't)

The real problem is that Ho Chi Minh will not surrender until he knows that he is losing the war and that our will to fight is sapped. Each time there are stories of dissent and discouragement among Americans about Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh believes that our will is weakening.

The President then talked about a letter he had received from a serviceman in Vietnam named Sanchez. The letter said, "Boss, you would be very proud of us. We went into battle holding our heads high, wearing the scarves of our wives and sweethearts."

On the selection of targets, the President said that there were no serious rifts with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but that one must always expect disagreement on matters of military policy. The President, more than anything, wants to avoid the danger of bombing Soviet ships in North Vietnamese ports. He believes that such bombing could run very serious risks (remember the Maine and the Lusitania). He told one of our generals that a port could be bombed if there were no ships in the harbor. The general said, "No Soviet ships?" And the President replied, "In this particular case, no ships period," because it is not easy for an airman flying through anti-aircraft fire to tell whether a ship is Russian or not.

The World Scene

The President talked about the history of our country and the fact that every President -- Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, FDR, and Truman had their severe critics because the Nation was engaged in conflict. He said that each President had a Chairman of a Foreign Relations Committee who was antagonistic -- because this is the way the system works. The President said Senator Borah always seemed to have more information than Roosevelt.

Looking back over the last several years, the Communist have fared poorly. They have made no gains in this Hemisphere, the Mid-East, and in Africa. All of these were potential "lightening boxes" and yet the Communists have not succeeded.

The Democratic Party

The President said that the Democratic Party for the first time since 1936 was free of debt. At the beginning of October, there will be a meeting of key leaders to lay out a program to help elect Democratic members to the Congress and defeat Republicans. The President referred to the loss of more than 40 key votes in the House because good Democrats went down to defeat in the 1966 elections. We have to restore a solid majority in the Congress to help get our programs through.

Concluding Remarks

The President thanked each of the labor leaders for coming to the White House. He said, "your interest is our interest and that as long as I am in the White House men like George Meany are always free to come through my door."

Larry E. Levinson